

Mixed mediums

EXHIBITS

Passionate 'WORLD'

Final creations of dying artist playful and lively

By Peter Tonguette
For The Columbus Dispatch

An ambitious series of paintings by Dennison W. Griffith can be seen in two exhibits that opened just days before his recent death.

The works represent a flurry of creative activity by the former president of the Columbus College of Art & Design, who died of cancer on Jan. 18 at age 63.

"Another World" opened Jan. 8 at CCAD's Beeler Gallery, and on Jan. 15, "Another World and Other Works" opened at Hammond Harkins Galleries, which represented Griffith for about 20 years. The exhibits reflect the artist's energy and spirit, even in the face of illness.

Marlana Hammond Keynes, owner of Hammond Harkins, said that Griffith was in his studio before Christmas.

"He compressed decades of painting into three years," she said. "He was so passionate."

Griffith was unable to attend the opening at Hammond Harkins but was present for events at the Beeler Gallery.

On opening night, about 400 people filled the CCAD auditorium, said Michael Goodson, director of exhibitions.

"Denny walked onto the stage, and all 400-odd people in that room came to their feet," Goodson said. "It was just our way of saying, 'You've affected all of us' — and I think he could feel it."

Added Keynes: "It took every ounce of energy that he had. ... But he managed to get up there, and he still had the same Denny humor, and he still explained his work and how he started it."

The "world" referenced in the exhibit titles is peculiar, indeed: Amoebalike organisms are present in the

At a glance

"Another World" continues through March 31 at the Columbus College of Art and Design's Beeler Gallery, 60 Cleveland Ave. Hours: 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Tuesdays through Fridays and noon to 6 p.m. Sundays. Call 614-222-3270 or visit www.beelergallery.org. "Another World and Other Works" continues through Feb. 21 at Hammond Harkins Galleries, 641 N. High St. Hours: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays and 1 to 5 p.m. Sundays. Call 614-238-3000 or visit www.hammondharkins.com.

works, usually propped up by unsteady-looking poles and ladders.

The rough terrain in the foreground is largely featureless; the color of the sky in the background ranges from orange to lime green. Although common elements are present throughout, the works differ considerably.

In "4.26," for example, two of the single-celled organisms regard each other warily; in "7.25," two others are mashed together, resembling a pair of feet with misaligned toes. (The works' titles indicate the date of a given painting.)

Shapes on top of shapes are seen in "7.1": An H-shaped form, pockmarked with what might look to some like deviled eggs, is bracketed by bulbous orange blobs.

In this mixed-up world, nothing is stable — not even the elaborate infrastructure connected to the organisms.

At the Beeler Gallery, some paintings have entire walls to themselves, encouraging viewers to contemplate each one at a time.

"It's a fairly spare hang, lots of space in between," Goodson said of the Beeler show. "The paintings can really breathe — they feel very important because they are very important."

A spare setup was chosen, too, at Hammond Harkins. The prevailing quality of these astonishingly inventive works, though, is their



"Untitled II"



"2.24"

playfulness.

"As Denny pointed out to me during our essentially year-and-a-half-long conversation about this work and this show: They're definitely not cancer paintings,"

Goodson said.

"They're really more about being alive than they are about being in a battle with cancer."

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